ACT files to test embryonic stem cell-based therapy for macular degeneration

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Advanced Cell Technology has filed an application with the FDA to begin an early phase trial of an embryonic stem cell-based therapy for macular degeneration. If the company name sounds familiar, that's because it's the same company that on November 22 received FDA approval to begin a trial for Stargardt's macular degeneration. Both trials are testing the same cells. In a press release, the company said:

> Company scientists view the use of the same hESC derived RPE cells for both trials as the most efficacious approach, as it permits the Company to leverage its experience with the FDA that it gained through the process of obtaining approval for the Stargardt's clinical trial to expedite the approval of its clinical trial in Dry AMD.

As with the company's Stargardt's trial and Geron's spinal cord injury trial, this new trial will be assessing safety in a very small number of patients - standard practice for any new therapy being tested. After proving safety in a phase I trial, a larger trial will assess whether or not the potential therapy is effective.

It's exciting to see embryonic stem cell derived therapies reaching patients. In general, more trials fail than succeed and we don't know in advance which ones are going to work. That's why there are hundreds of cancer trials going on around the country, and why we need hundreds of stem cell trials too. Hopefully CIRM's macular degeneration disease team led by Mark Humayun at USC won't be far behind ACT with their own version of an embryonic stem cell-based therapy for macular degeneration. And hopefully, one of them will provide a cure for the roughly 30 million people worldwide who are losing or have lost vision due to the disease.

Here's a video about the CIRM disease team project:

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Tags: Disease Team, Humayun, university of southern california, macular degeneration, ACT

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